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ABSTRACT

In response to new provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this issue describes the promising special education research that is helping all students participate successfully in large-scale testing programs. The first article, "State-Wide Assessment Programs," discusses the new provisions in IDEA that require states to have policies and procedures to ensure that children with disabilities are included in general state- and district-wide assessment programs. Promising approaches that states are using to make appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities are explained, such as accommodations related to timing or scheduling, assessment setting, response format, and presentation format. Alternate assessments and different ways of reporting results are described, and recommendations for developing alternative assessment systems are provided. A second article, "Views from the Field," summarizes different views on implementation issues and concerns about including children with disabilities in large-scale assessments. Views are presented from a parent, a researcher, and school psychologists. A final article "State-Wide Efforts," discusses efforts in Kentucky, Maryland, and Hawaii to include all children in large-scale assessments. A list of contacts on the referenced research in this issue is included. (CR)

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The trend to include students with disabilities in large-scale testing programs became a requirement in the **1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**. *This issue describes the promising special education research that is helping all students participate successfully.*

Too often, in the past, students with disabilities have not fully participated in State and district assessments only to be short-changed by the low expectations and less challenging curriculum that may result from exclusion.

Judy Heumann, Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Education

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Inside

Emerging Approaches 2
Views from the Field 6
State-Wide Efforts 7
Contacts & Resources 8

State-Wide Assessment Programs

Including Students with Disabilities

The newly enacted ***Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997*** (IDEA) requires that students with disabilities participate in large-scale assessments. The law states:

- As a condition of eligibility, states must have policies and procedures to ensure that children with disabilities are included in general state- and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations where necessary.
- Effective July 1, 1998, individualized education programs (IEPs) must include a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in such assessments; and if the IEP team determines that the child will not participate in a particular state- or district-wide assessment of student achievement (or part of such assessment), the IEP must include a statement of why that assessment is not appropriate for the child; and how the child will be assessed.
- For the students whose IEPs specify that they should be excluded from regular assessments, the state must ensure development of guidelines for their participation in alternate assessments, and develop and conduct alternate assessments no later than July 1, 2000.
- States must have recording policies and procedures in place that ensure proper reporting of information regarding the performance of students with disabilities on large-scale assessments.

Most districts and states are in the early stages of developing and implementing assessment models that include ***all*** students. A large number are already using testing accommodations and a few are developing alternate assessments. But for the majority of state and local district practitioners, this new mandate is raising many questions and concerns. Beginning on page 2, we'll take a look at how special education researchers are informing the discussion.

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State-Wide Assessment Programs: Emerging Approaches

Over the last decade, researchers—many with OSEP funding—have investigated how students with disabilities can be included in large-scale assessments that reflect standards-based reform efforts at both state and local levels.

One of the most comprehensive efforts has been the work done at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). Established in 1990 with funding from OSEP, the major research focus for NCEO has been on how to increase participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments.

In a 1995 study, NCEO found great variability in the rate at which students with disabilities participate in assessments. In fact, few states—with the exception of Kentucky and Maryland—currently have fully inclusive participation policies in place. "It is not a question of who participates, it should be a question of how, and that question should be decided by people closest to the individual student," explains NCEO Associate Director, **Martha Thurlow**. NCEO estimates that about 85% of the students eligible for special education services could take large-scale assessments with or without accommodations, and the remainder might need an alternate assessment.

What do we know about the issues related to accommodations, alternate assessments, and reporting of results? Promising research that is emerging in each of these areas follows.

NCEO publishes research syntheses and reports, most for a fee. Check out their website: http://www.coled.umn.edu/NCEO. Relevant titles include

- Self-Study Guide for the Development of Statewide Assessments that Include Students with Disabilities
- Issues and Considerations in Alternate Assessments
- Increasing the Participation of Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments
- Providing Assessment Accommodations
- Reporting Educational Results for Students with Disabilities

Promising Approaches: Accommodations

Many states allow for special testing conditions and accommodations. An accommodation is provided because of a student need, not to give a student an advantage. Used appropriately, accommodations should improve the validity of scores by removing the distortions or biases caused by disabilities. NCEO categorizes the most common assessment accommodations as related to

- Timing or scheduling,
- Assessment setting,
- Response format,
- Presentation format.

Proper use of accommodations has become a major con. rn. According to Thurlow, important questions focus on: Who gets assessment accommodations? How are they implemented? Who implements them?

One problem is that accommodation policies tend to vary from district to district and from state to state, making it virtually impossible to compare student performance. Moreover, there is great variation in use of accommodations across disability groups. For example, accommodations for students with physical or sensory disabilities are routinely approved, whereas the same is not true for students with cognitive or behavioral difficulties.

Special education researchers have been pursuing answers to issues surrounding use of appropriate accommodations. Following are several descriptions of how researchers are furthering our understanding.

Ensuring Access to Test Demands

"Accommodations are certainly not just about raising test scores for students with disabilities, or simply leveling the playing field; rather, accommodations are fundamentally about how to validly measure what students know and are able to do," points out University of Oregon professor, **Gerald Tindal**. According to Tindal, educators should consider the learner's needs, the task demands, and the purpose of the particular accommodation. "It would be ***ideal*** if teachers could turn to the research and find a list of preferred and best practices in testing students with disabilities." That goal underlies much of Tindal's current research.

With OSEP funding, Tindal has been studying the way in which large-scale tests are administered. In one study, Tindal and his colleagues found that reading the mathematics test aloud had a positive effect for students with disabilities. According to Tindal, "Most tests place considerable reading demands on students—not only do they have to read the directions, but they must also read the individual problems and make choices," explains Tindal. "When a student performs poorly on a math test that requires considerable reading, is the skill deficit one of math or reading or both?"

State-Wide Assessment Programs: Emerging Approaches (cont.)

Tindal stresses that "a sound decision-making process must be in place that encourages the application of research-based special education practices." Curriculum-based measurement, much of it created with OSEP funding, is an example of an excellent starting point.

Tindal has been working with practitioners in Oregon to embed curriculum-based measurement into the IEP process and relate performance to that attained on large-scale assessments. Bend School District, which serves 50,000 students in a rural community, is one example. With the support of special education supervisor, **Jan Brigham**, a pilot group of teachers began considering standards for their students in mathematics and reading. "Our goal was to make assessment the basis for the IEP," Brigham describes the process. "We identified standards and benchmarks, determined the appropriate assessment, and wrote these into the students' IEPs." Through this process, which Brigham cautions must be approached long-term, teachers began to think differently about the IEP. "As we defined standards and sought ways to put them into practice, we began to write IEPs to reflect levels of mastery—which challenged us to learn more about how to assess children."

> *"Special educators definitely need more technical knowledge, but administrators, general educators, and parents also need support in understanding the purpose of accommodations."*
>
> *Ann Finzel, Resource Room Teacher*
> *Eugene, Oregon*

Developing Accommodations for Complex Performance Tasks

The need for information about acceptable testing accommodations led **Stephen Elliott**, researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to develop the ***Assessment Accommodation Checklist*** (AAC).

Work on the AAC grew out of several OSEP-funded projects, one of which studied how students with mild disabilities reacted to on-demand performance assessment tasks in mathematics and language arts.

"We needed a way to organize and record information on testing accommodations provided by teachers," describes Elliott. "The AAC can be used by teachers as a springboard for ideas, in addition to serving as a recording device." Prior to using the AAC, Elliott recommends that the IEP team discuss participation and accommodations.

The checklist presently contains 74 accommodations that are organized into eight domains:

- Motivation.
- Assistance prior to administering assessment.
- Scheduling.
- Setting.
- Directions.
- Assistance during the assessment.
- Aids, equipment, or adaptive technology.
- Changes in test format.

Using the AAC, educators rate the extent to which they think that a particular accommodation will help the student best demonstrate his or her ability. After the child has taken the test, accommodations are then rated according to whether or not they were helpful and fair.

> *"Accommodations should only be permitted if they affect the scores of special education students more than they do the scores of general education students."*
>
> *Lynn Fuchs, Professor*
> *Vanderbilt University*

Reducing Variability in Accommodation Practices

"In many accountability systems, the performance of students with disabilities does not *count*, in part because no widely agreed upon methods exist for determining fair, valid accommodations," points out **Lynn Fuchs**, Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. As a result, there is wide variability in accommodation policies, making comparisons between states or districts unfair.

With research funding from OSEP, Fuchs wants to remedy this situation. "Schools need standardized methods for determining which accommodations are valid for which students." To do this, she is developing, validating, and codifying the ***Dynamic Assessment Tool for Accommodations*** (DATA), which will be available at the completion of the project.

Promising Approaches: Alternate Assessments

Alternate assessments are one approach to including students with severe disabilities fairly and meaningfully in large-scale assessments. While still in their infancy, alternate assessments offer promise for ensuring that all students are included fully in the accountability process.

State-Wide Assessment Programs: Emerging Approaches (cont.)

NCEO offers the following recommendations for developing alternate assessment systems:

- Define the purpose of the alternate assessment system and who qualifies to participate in it.
- Identify the common core of learning (i.e., what students need to know and be able to do) for the alternate assessment.
- Develop participation guidelines for the alternate assessment system.
- Determine how results will be aggregated.
- Integrate results with results from the general assessment.

One example is ***Kentucky's Alternate Portfolio Assessment*** (KAPA). With funding from OSEP, University of Kentucky Professor **Harold Kleinert** launched the development process. "The key is to relate the alternate assessment to core learning outcomes for the students," Kleinert asserts. In Kentucky, examples of learning outcomes include the abilities to communicate effectively, use quantitative or numerical concepts in real life problems, and effectively use interpersonal skills.

The KAPA allows students to communicate in alternate ways. Here's an example of what entries might look like:

- Fourth grade: Using appropriate pictures from his communication board, a student showed how he learned to use the school library. Peer support was documented, as were specific adaptations developed by the teacher. The student also included a checklist, where he checked off each step in checking out a book.
- Twelfth grade: In preparing for a school dance, a student and her nondisabled peers planned what they would wear. The student included budget planning sheets, checklists, pictures, receipts, and mementos.

Implementing such an assessment system requires extensive professional development, including basic training in incorporating the portfolio assessment process into daily classroom routines, trainer-of-trainers training, and training in scoring the portfolios. However, as **Sarah Kennedy**, the state-wide coordinator of the KAPA, points out, "Because the KAPA is based on best practice, practitioners have a great interest in being trained."

Amy Longwell, special education teacher at Danville High School, agrees that the KAPA training is well worth the effort. "The KAPA has improved my teaching because it continually reinforces best practice." Longwell embedded the KAPA system into her peer tutoring program—a best practice that has increasingly been recommended for developing the social interaction skills, genuine friendships, and support networks for students with disabilities. For more information about Longwell's classroom approach, see her article in an upcoming issue of ***TEACHING Exceptional Children***.

Promising Approaches: Reporting Results

Reporting information on students with disabilities is important because it ensures that they are represented in the accountability system. In general, there is great variability in reporting practices from district to district and state to state, making comparisons difficult. Complicating this issue is the concern that when special education students are included in large-scale assessments, results might not be comparable to those of other students because of the special testing circumstances. "Ideally, the scores of students receiving accommodations would be aggregated with the scores of all other students," asserts NCEO's Thurlow. "It is important to remember that the problem of score incomparability was not caused by students with disabilities, but by exclusionary develop-

Assessing literacy development in children with severe speech and physical impairments (SSPI) presents a great challenge. All current assessment instruments and procedures require children to speak at length, write at length, complete answer sheets for large numbers of items, or respond within strict time limits—all of which might be beyond the abilities of children with SSPI.

With OSEP funding, **David Koppenhaver** has been developing a valid and reliable assessment battery that measures test reading and listening comprehension in children with SSPI. You can contact him at the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, Duke University Medical Center, Box 3888, Durham, NC 27710.

ment assessment practices that presume the achievement of students with disabilities is not important."

School districts are seeking ways to report the progress of *all* students in meaningful ways. According to **Judy Poulson**, assistant director of special education for the Aurora, Colorado, School District, "Few dispute the need for accountability for *all* students—but building principals are concerned, and rightfully so, that aggregated scores will be misinterpreted by the public as a failure."

The Long Beach, California, Unified School District offers an example of how educators are approaching the reporting issue. Two years ago the district decided to include all of their 5,000 special education students in large-scale assessments. "There are a variety of ways to include children," reports **Lynn Winters**, Assistant Superintendent for Research, Planning, and Evaluation in Long Beach Unified School District. "For some people, the problem is not so much how to test **all** children, but how to report the results in a way that makes sense."

With consultation from staff at NCEO, Long Beach educators set out to tie large-scale assessments directly to school effectiveness policies that advocate for students reaching high performance standards. In response to the need for accurate information, Winters points out that the district decided to issue two separate assessment reports: one that is generated for everyone taking the standard assessment, and a separate one for the approximately 300 students with severe disabilities who participate in the district's alternate assessment. Schools are held accountable for both sets of scores, and any missing data lowers the total school scores. Information is also kept regarding accommodations used by students.

NCEO Suggestions to Guide Reporting Practices

- Include data from all test takers in reports.
- Include rates of exclusion that are specific to students with disabilities and the reasons for the exclusion.
- Calculate participation or exclusion rates using consistent written guidelines for the rates.
- Maintain records in such a way that data for students with disabilities can be reported separately, overall, or by other breakdowns.
- Keep records of the use of accommodations according to the type of accommodation.
- Inform parents about the reporting policy for their child's data.
- Report academic performance of students with disabilities with the same regularity as is done for nondisabled students.

Summary

The *1997 Reauthorization of IDEA* highlights the importance of including students with disabilities in all educational reform activities and, in particular, in state-wide assessment systems. Special education researchers, and the practitioners who are pioneering efforts to prepare students to take part in and succeed in large-scale assessments, are ensuring that this mandate is implemented in the best interest of the students, their families, and the educators who assist them.

"Including students with disabilities in the development and implementation of assessments is a vital step towards providing access to the general curriculum and to learning challenging standards."

Judy Heumann, Assistant Secretary U.S. Department of Education

Views from the Field

As educators begin including students with disabilities in large-scale assessments, implementation issues are emerging.

Support Teachers

Kathy Morris, a parent of twin boys who have disabilities and staff development specialist for Region V Educational Service Center in Beaumont, Texas, sees too much of the burden for including all children falling upon teachers. "Unless teachers have resources—including sufficient professional development—large-scale assessments can pose real drawbacks for children and teachers." For example, Morris sees a reluctance on the part of teachers to include students with low incidence disabilities in assessments that measure academic progress. "I understand why teachers are more comfortable assessing students' social goals than they are cognitive ones—after all, an increased instructional emphasis on social goals is often written into IEPs for many of these children—but there must also be some balance with other more academic skills."

> *"Including all students in district-wide and state-wide assessments has the potential to improve teaching."*
>
> *Kathy Morris*
> *Staff Development Specialist*
> *Beaumont, TX*

Morris encourages districts to support the fair assessment of students with disabilities, offering their teachers professional development. Morris points out that even in schools where inclusion is practiced, many teachers are not trained in how to work with students with low incidence disabilities. "If a teacher feels unsure about how to teach a child, then a high-stakes assessment will only escalate stress and fear—assessments should be about responsibility and not about fear of losing."

Address Students with Limited English Proficiency

The 1997 report, ***The Inclusion of Students with Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students in Large-Scale Assessments: A Summary of Recent Progress***, from the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that there are approximately 3.2 million students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in the nation's schools.

Students with LEP **and** disabilities present a unique challenge to school districts engaged in creating fair testing practices. "Including these children in large-scale assessments is so new that there is a large gap between what students need and what educators know about addressing students' needs," points out California State University-Long Beach researcher, **Jana Echevarria**. "As a result, too often disability takes precedence over the LEP issues—which can affect the child's performance and ultimately the overall rankings."

Echevarria recommends that educators take a proactive approach by becoming sensitive to the language and cultural issues facing their students. "There is a need for increased training in how language and culture affects learning, as well as how limited language proficiency interacts with disabilities."

Dr. Echevarria's newest book, ***Sheltered Content Instruction: Teaching English Language Learners with Diverse Abilities*** (1998), puts into practice her research on the instructional and curricular needs of LEP students with disabilities. It is available from Allyn and Bacon.

Consider the Student's Needs

School psychologists play a major role in coordinating IEP meetings where the majority of testing decisions typically take place. As a result, **Susan Gorin**, Executive Director of the National Association of School Psychologists, predicts that school psychologists will assume increasingly more responsibility for ensuring that decisions regarding testing accommodations are appropriate given the child's special needs. "The challenge is always to measure the child's abilities—and not his or her disabilities."

Pat Howard, a school psychology state consultant in Florida, offers the following suggestions to ensure that assessment accommodations are appropriate:

- Work with individuals who know the student best.
- Explain possible accommodations thoroughly. For example, concretely define terms, such as "time on test" or "frequent breaks."
- Define student outcomes clearly, state how the child will be expected to achieve them, and monitor progress.
- List possible accommodations on the child's IEP.
- Prepare the child to "take" the assessment, as many children have test anxiety and poor test-taking skills.
- Train test monitors (e.g., paraprofessionals) in how to use specific accommodations, as well as in how to "read" any cues that the student may use to signal the need for a particular accommodation (e.g., need to take a break).

State-Wide Efforts

Prior to the 1997 Reauthorization of IDEA, most states had taken some steps toward including ***all*** children in large-scale assessments.

Kentucky: Studying the Impact of Accommodations

With support from OSEP, Kentucky has studied the impact of accommodations on performance data, in its Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) assessment system. Kentucky allows accommodations for students with disabilities that are consistent with the appropriate delivery of instructional service for that individual student. Accommodations may include changes in the administration of the assessment and/or recording of student responses that are consistent with the normal instructional strategies and assistive devices and services identified on the student's IEP or 504 plan.

A recent research report by **Daniel Koretz** of the CRESST/RAND Institute on Education and Training found that the majority of students with disabilities who participated in the KIRIS assessment required at least one accommodation. As policymakers and educators look at regulating the use of accommodations, Koretz suggests they consider the following steps:

- Clarify the intended purposes.
- Clarify guidelines for use.
- Monitor use.
- Undertake periodic audits.

Maryland: Developing an Inclusive Assessment

At 99%, Maryland has one of the highest participation rates for students in its state-wide assessment system. Students with disabilities are expected to participate unless they fit exemption criteria (e.g., second semester senior transfer from out-of-state; first-time, limited English proficient student). Currently in the pilot stage, the Independence Mastery Assessment Program (IMAP), an alternate assessment, measures outcomes that are life-skills oriented. OSEP supported the initial development of IMAP.

John Haigh, of the Maryland State Department of Education, oversees the effort to include ***all*** children in Maryland state-wide assessments. He offers these insights:

- Highlight the rationale for including all children in the assessment.
- Include all stakeholders in implementation.
- Involve parents when developing alternate assessments.
- Link discussions about assessment to student outcomes.
- Use a local district accountability coordinator to monitor exemptions and accommodations.
- Build in significant professional development for teachers and administrators.
- Remember that change takes time—so go slowly.

Hawaii: Establishing a Norm Group

Unlike other states, Hawaii is a single unified school district with a diverse school population. Approximately 12.9% of the students receive special education services. The Hawaii Department of Special Education mandates annual testing for public school students in grades 3, 6, 8, and 10. The ***Stanford Achievement Test*** (8th Edition), is used for large-scale assessment.

Amelia Jenkins, professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, has been conducting research on participation rates. A study of the 1995 data revealed that an average of 64% of students with disabilities were tested. "One of the major issues was establishing a norm group for students with disabilities that truly reflected the demographics—including culture, language, and ethnicity—of Hawaii." Whereas students in Hawaii were found to represent some of the national norms, there were areas where students performed differently. Jenkins recommends that other states that use standardized measurements establish norms for their own state, rather than rely exclusively on national norms.

Permissible Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (number of states that permit the accommodation is in parentheses)

- Large Print (34)
- Braille or Sign Language (33)
- Small Group Administration (33)
- Flexible Scheduling (31)
- Separate Testing Session (31)
- Extra Time (30)
- Audiotaped Instructions/ Questions (27)
- Multiple/Extra Testing Sessions (25)
- Word Processor (21)
- Simplification of Directions (15)
- Audiotaped Responses (12)
- Use of Dictionaries (9)
- Alternate Test (6)
- Other languages (2)

From CCSSO/NCREL

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